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General Notes.

GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVELS.

Where is the greatest forest in the world ?—The question was asked in the Forestry section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, at its last annual meeting. The importance of forests for equalizing the climate and the rainfall of the globe was under discussion, and the purpose of the question was to show where the great forest tracts of the world are situated.

One member replying off hand, was inclined to maintain that the greatest continuous tract of forest lies north of the St. Lawrence River, in the provinces of Quebec and Ontario, extending northward to Hudson Bay and Labrador; a region measuring about 1,700 miles in length from east to west, and 1,000 miles in width north and south.

A professor from the Smithsonian Institution rejoined that a much larger continuous area of timber lands was to be found, reckoning from those in the State of Washington northward through British Columbia and Alaska. But he limited his statement to North America, for he added that, in his opinion, the largest forest in the world occupied the valley of the Amazon, embracing much of northern Brazil, eastern Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, and Guiana; a region at least 2,100 miles in length by 1,300 in breadth.

Exception was immediately taken to this statement by several members who, in the light of recent explorations, have computed the forest area of Central Africa in the valley of the Congo, including the head waters of the Nile to the northeast, and those of Zambesi on the south. According to their estimates, Central Africa contains a forest region not less than 3,000 miles in length from north to south, and of vast, although not fully known width, from east to west. Discussion, in which the evidence afforded by travels and surveys was freely cited, seemed favorable to the defender of the Amazonian forests.

Later in the day the entire question was placed in another light by a member who was so fortunate as to be able to speak from some knowledge of still another great forest region of the globe. This gentleman gave a vivid picture of the vast, solemn taigas and urmans, the pine, larch and cedar forests of Siberia.

It appears that Siberia, from the plain of the Obi River on the west to the valley of the Indighirka on the east, embracing the great plains,

or river valleys, of the Yenisei, Olenek, Lena and Yana rivers, is one great timber belt, averaging more than 1,000 miles in breadth from north to south—being fully 1,700 miles wide in the Yenisei district—and having a length from east to west of not less than 4,600 versts, about 3,000 miles. Unlike equatorial forests, the trees of the Siberian taigas are mainly conifers, comprising pines of several varieties, firs and larches. In the Yenisei, Lena and Olensk regions there are thousands of square miles where no human being has ever been. The long-stemmed conifers rise to a height of 150 feet or more and stand so closely together that walking among them is difficult.

The dense, lofty tops exclude the pale Arctic sunshine, and the straight, pale trunks, all looking exactly alike, so bewild the obscurity that all sense of direction is lost. Even the most experienced trappers of sable dare not venture into the dense taigas without taking the precaution of “blazing” the trees constantly with hatchets as they walk forward. If lost there the hunter rarely finds his way out, but perishes miserably from starvation or cold. The natives avoid the taigas, and have a name for them which signifies “places where the mind is lost.”

The discussion closed very appropriately by Prof. Fernow, of Washington, with an illustrated lecture, which showed how in the earlier ages forests had covered all the continental areas, and had rendered the climate equable to a degree now unknown.

At first human beings battled with the forest in a fitful manner, making small clearings for themselves; but, gradually, by the aid of fire, and of their own increasing numbers, they have so far prevailed in the struggle for supremacy that the forests are hopelessly conquered. But grave evils follow their extermination; and now the question is how to foster, protect and preserve them. (Quoted from *Youth's Companion*, *Scientific American*, March, 1895.)